


DANSE MACABRE

The Representation of Death and Its Ethicality in Contemporary Art

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ABSTRACT

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In this written part of the Bachelor's thesis I present my artwork considering death and the fear of dying, go through the working process, explore how the subject has been considered in art before and ponder the moral and ethical questions which rise of exhibiting the artwork.

The data for this thesis is collected from various sources, such as books, e-books and internet articles considering art and culture related to death.

The main focus of this thesis is on representations of death in contemporary and medieval art. In order to form a basis for understanding the subject, the biological and social side and of death is discussed, and the fear of dying is researched. The concept of is examined and further explored in an installation artwork created alongside the written part of the thesis.

Key words: contemporary art, danse macabre, installation, death, fear of dying

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	DEATH IN GENERAL 1	5
2.1	About Rituals Related to Death.....	5
2.1.1	Biology of Death.....	5
2.1.2	Fear of Dying	6
3	ART RELATED TO DEATH 1	8
3.1.1	Danse Macabre, Ars Moriendi and Vanitas.....	8
3.1.2	Other Death Related Art.....	10
3.1.3.	Death Related Contemporary Art.....	12
4	ABOUT INSTALLATION	18
5	ETHICS IN ART	19
6	THE ARTWORK: DANSE MACABRE 1.....	21
6.1.	THE VIDEO WORKS.....	21
6.1.2	PAINTINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.....	23
6.1.3.	THE BEDROOM.....	29
7	CONCLUSIONS.....	35
8	LIST OF REFERENCES 1	36

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to lead the reader inside of preparing, making and exhibiting an artwork. It answers to the following questions: how to make an installation on a specific subject? How does one begin? What is there to know before? How has this subject already been handled in art? How to arrange the exhibition of the piece of artwork? What kind of things one should take on account or take precaution on? What are the ethics of presenting the artwork? I explore the concept of death, its physicality, the fear of it and even take a glimpse on the spiritual part. I have purposely left out euthanasia and suicide, because they consider the wish to die, rather than being afraid of it.

2 DEATH IN GENERAL 1

2.1 About Rituals Related to Death

Before the end of 19th century, the medicine had little resources to help the dying, and because of this, the attitude towards death was pretty fatalistic. This does not mean death was not feared. Hell provoked fear, although there were also people, of whom one “knew” where they would end up to, and for them, death was not scary. (Pajari, 2014, 89.)

The community has always tried to manage the shock of death by rituals. Through them, death has been made into an acceptable part of the community’s worldview. The following mourning has given time for the relatives to reorganize. (Koski, 2014, 107.)

Upon the 20th century, rituals have lost their meaning, and emotional duties have taken their place. Ritualizing has become important, when the deceased has been young, or the death has been unexpected, for example in a case of a traffic accident, where multiple people have deceased. Spontaneous ritualistic behavior occurs, for example bringing candles and flowers to the place of the accident. (Koski, 2014, 114.)

2.1.1. Biology of Death

Death is usually feared because of practical reasons: one fears the pain before the death. Modern medicine is capable of taking the pain away, and it is only a question of whether a big enough quantity of medicine is regulated. (Takala & Joensuu, 38.)

Defining the time of death is difficult. Often death is defined biologically, and with medical resources, each deceased can be given an exact time of death. Even so, both the medical and the biological ways of timing death and their justifications have varied a lot. This is due the vaulting development of medicine and different kind of treatments. Up until the 1960’s death was understood as the stopping of the process of both breathing and heartbeat, even though nowadays it is possible to maintain both artificially. Today, death is explained as the stopping of the brain function. Although, this explanation

is difficult with coma patients and the brain dead. (Hakola, Kivistö & Mäkinen, 2014, 9.)

Consciousness shuts down in ten seconds, if the blood circulation does not provide oxygen to the brain. If one's temperature is normal during this, an incurable damage will occur, even if the blood circulation would later revive.

With a severe disease, death usually comes as gradually gathering tiredness and prostration. With cardiac arrest death is very quick. Because the brains gaining of oxygen ends immediately, conscious dies out at once and one has probably no time to feel any greater pain. In severe accidents death usually also comes so fast, and there is no time to understand what happened. (Takala & Joensuu, 2000, 38.)

One has gained knowledge about being dead from people who have had cardiac arrests but have come back to life. Some people, who have been near drowning, has also reported similar experiences. We have, however, no proof these aren't just interferences by the consciousness. (Takala & Joensuu, 2000, 38.)

2.1.2. The Fear of Dying

Philosopher James Warren has divided the fear of death into four key parts:

1. The fear concerns the actual state of being dead, and what this state is like.
2. The fear concerns the mortality itself, the thought of life and existing coming to an end.
3. The fear concerns the date of the death, for example it being too early.
4. The fear concerns the process of the dying, the possible pain, long-lasting illnesses, etc.

(Hakola et al. 2014, 10.)

Even though Warren emphasizes the fear of one's own (Hakola et al. 2014, 10), the fear may also concern about the death of a loved one. According to the interpretation of Hakola et al., another philosopher, Martin Heidegger, finds it is not the dying part that is difficult, but the fact that one is mortal to begin with. (Hakola et al. 2014, 12.) Many thinkers have suggested, the fear of death might diminish once getting to know death better. The fears could be processed for example through philosophy, arts and literature.

(Hakola et al. 2014, 10.) The questions of death are also typical for many religious beliefs. According to many beliefs, the lived life affects on the afterlife, for example in the tradition of Christianity there is eternal life, whereas in the tradition of Buddhism, the relief from the circle of life is to be aimed for. (Hakola et al. 2014, 12.) According to Hakola et al., sociologist Zygmunt Bauman says, in addition to religions, the pursuing of immortality embodies also a lot of phenomena joined with the continuity of the society, for example producing offspring or leaving a mark into history or art (Hakola et al. 2014, 13).

3 ART RELATED TO DEATH 1

3.1 Danse Macabre, Ars Moriendi and Vanitas

La Danse Macabre, the dance of death, is both a literary and visual theme which reminds readers and viewers of their own mortality. (Oosterwijk, 2017) In this theme, either deceased or skeletons lead people of all societal classes to dance. One is vividly presented the idea of death not sparing anyone. No one is to avoid the passing of time; the skeletons and rotten corpses are being led to dance with the most different groups of people. Alternatively, the dead lead the living to the grave. The theme was invented in the 15th century, and it became very popular at the 16th century. (Kallionsivu, 2007, 190.)



PICTURE 1: 1: Dance of Death. Wellcome Images, London

https://assets.atlasobscura.com/article_images/46977/image.jpg

Even though *Ars Moriendi* is a literary genre, it is necessary to go through this subject, because it offered an inspiration to my artwork and plays an important part in it.

The *Ars Moriendi* first appeared in the middle of the 15th century and it explains how a Christian should die in order that he might make it into heaven. It exists in several versions and different languages. There are extant today at least 300 manuscripts in most of the western vernaculars, and added to this number are the numerous printed copies that can be found in libraries around the world. The text was printed from either wood block or movable type editions well over one hundred times before 1500 and frequently during the first half of the sixteenth centuries (O'Connor, 1–2). What makes this work rather unique is its emphasis as it deals not at all with living, but only with dying. The moriens is both warned and consoled, threatened and relieved as devils tempt him to turn from solid faith to mundane objects; these harbringers from hell are foiled however by angels and eventually by Christ himself. The topic of death has always been popular and part of the psyche of society and it also is a standard theme in catechetical teaching. This was especially so during the late Middle Ages when memory of the plague was still very vivid as, though its initial devastating spread was almost one hundred years passed, sporadic outbreaks continued to take lives and enhance fear. The fact that so many could die so quickly brought divine retribution and the need for spiritual salvation. Campbell Jeffrey, 1995

Those leaflets, which were called by the name *Ars Moriendi*, became popular in the 15th century. If in one's last moments there was a shortage of priests with the proper knowledge of rituals, and of how to execute them, one turned to the help of the leaflet. The leaflet offered a coherent way to face death in practise, and to channel the anxiety connected to it into a meaningful action. The culture of the late Middle Ages offered an understandable and controllable form to the fear of dying, and in the same time, it also stirred them up. The way to face death offered clear instructions to kingdom come, as long as one was capable of being observant to them. (Kallionsivu, 2007, 187–189.)

Perhaps the most well-known death-themed genre in art is *vanitas*. According to the Contemporary Art Museum Tate, *vanitas* is a still life artwork which includes symbolic objects, such as musical instruments, wine, skulls, candles, and books, which remind the viewer of their mortality and the vanity of worldly pleasures. (Tate Museum, n.d.)



PICTURE 2 2: Vanitas by Harmen Steenwijk, circa 1640

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanitas#/media/File:Harmen_Steenwijk_-_Vanitas.JPG

3.1.2 Other Death Related Art

In addition for vanitas and Danse Macabre, fine art has other death-related genres. Some of the most important include:

Plague art: The first wave of plague killed 25-50 percent of the European population. Because of this, artists who had earlier painted joyful paintings turned into painting death and devastation, and religious themes turned dark. Patients treated in hospitals, dying persons on death beds, and sculptural figures on tombs became popular. (Lecraire 2014.)



PICTURE 3: 3: Triumph of Death by Bruegel the Elder

<http://www.lazerhorse.org/2016/12/10/black-death-art-paintings-inspired-by-the-plague/>

The Grim Reaper: Earlier influenced a lot by the ancient Greek, the Grim Reaper received its final form during the plague: a skeleton wielding a scythe and wearing a black or red robe. He was usually portrayed as a guide to lead the dying away, and in later times, he tried to take the person's life himself. The grim reaper can be found throughout in Europe, in every form of art, also in the Danse Macabre genre. (Lecraire 2014.)



PICTURE 4: 4: The Grim Reaper

https://onhylandhill.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/tumblr_mnmh4t07191ro2pzmo1_500.jpg

Dance of the Skeletons: This genre, too, is related to Danse Macabre. However, dance of the skeletons is strictly based on folklore, with no social or moral message. The skeletons are usually portrayed as coming out of open graves, cavorting about, dancing and playing music. This genre was short-termed, with few examples surviving. (Lecraire 2014.)

Anamorphosis and hidden symbols of death: Anamorphosis refers to hidden imagery that can only be seen in different angles. This trick has been used throughout the history ever since Leonardo Da Vinci. (Lecraire 2014.)



PICTURE 5: 5: Perhaps the most known example of anamorphosis: The Ambassadors by Holbein, 1533. <https://www.anamorphosis.com/ambassadors.html>

Death and the Maiden: This often strongly erotic imagery, which can be traced back all the way to ancient Greece, first depicted elegant women dancing with the death, but later turned into a forced intercourse with death. (Lecraire 2014.)

Triumph de la Mort (The Triumph of dead): Even though the theme had the same message as Danse Macabre, Triumph de la Mort depicts death as an instrument of chaos and destruction. The theme was especially associated with times with the plague and wars. (Lecraire 2014.)

3.1.3 Death Related Contemporary Art

Here I present some contemporary artists that have made work about death, even though most of their viewpoint of the matter is totally different.

Natura Morta (2010–2013), work series by Maria Ionova Gribina, depicts of photographs of dead animals, which she wanted to save for world of art, with flowers. The

work is influenced by her childhood memories of burying found dead animals to a border of a forest with her brother. They then decorated the tombs with flowers and stones. (Ionova-Gribina, 2013.)

The thought of remaking this childhood exploration of death and mortality, probably of the first encounter with death, is touching. One can sense the innocence and purity of a young child. Presenting cute little animals and beautiful flowers is suitable art for everybody's living room wall, regardless of age, but adding this morbid touch makes it interesting. Also idea of taking a dead animal and making it live forever in the form of art is delicate.



PICTURE 6: 6: Maria Ionova-Gribina: *Natura Morta*, 2013 (from the artist's web page) <http://www.ionovagribina.ru/posts/6-natura-morta>

Kris Vervaeke's photo series *Ad Infinitum* exposes the perishable nature of bodies. It depicts old portrait photographs found from tomb. During time, the photos were exposed to sun, rain, extreme temperatures and humidity. (Vervaeke, 2013.)

This photo series is interesting in the sense that, as it exposes the perishable nature of the body, it can also speak of the memory of a loved one. These photographs, even though suffer and change due the circumstances, still depict a figure. Much like the memory of a deceased; it gradually changes from a vivid image into a one-dimensional, thin resemblance, which has still led traces.



PICTURE 7: 7: Kris Vervaeke: Ad Infinitum, 2013, artist's webpage

<http://www.krisvervaeke.com/wp-content/uploads/kris-vervaeke-at-infinitum-14.jpg>

Perhaps the most relevant work for me to study is the For the Love of God, a sculpture by Damien Hirst. The sculpture is a life-size cast of a human skull in platinum, entirely covered by 8,601 VVS to flawless pavé-set diamonds, weighing a total of 1,106.18 carats. Set into the forehead is a large pear-shaped pink diamond, known as the Skull Star Diamond. The teeth are those of the original skull, which was purchased by Hirst in London, and dates back to the eighteenth-century. (Sterling, 2011.)



PICTURE 8: 8: Damien Hirst: For the Love of God, 2007

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/For_the_Love_of_God#/media/File:Hirst-Love-Of-God.jpg

Dutch art historian Rudi Fuchs, writing about the work in 2007, observed: ‘The skull is out of this world, celestial almost. It proclaims victory over decay. At the same time it represents death as something infinitely more relentless. Compared to the tearful sadness of a vanitas scene, the diamond skull is glory itself.’ (Sterling, 2011)

Compared to Hirst, my Vanitas sculpture is way more literal, just a setting with basic objects. Rather than an innovative piece of its own, it is more like a rerun. However, Hirst himself does not seem to add that much new, either. In my opinion, this work runs a bit flat. It feels like a gimmick. This is to say, compared to some of his other works. And even if the work indeed is beautiful, it’s message of the materialism and consumerism we maintain today seems too obvious. However, the diamonds could also be thought not to be referring to glitter and posh lifestyle, but as symbols of eternity.

I came across to a Finnish artist who had had, not only a piece of art considering the subject of death but a whole exhibition, called ‘Exitus’, by Minna Havukainen. The exhibition itself consisted mainly of photographs, videos and community artworks. The photographs show relatives of deceased and professionals who work with funeral arrangements. (Hakola, 2014, 65–66.)

According to Havukainen, the most rewarding part in the Exitus-process was bringing the processes that come with dying into broad daylight. The project brings up not only the dying and their relatives but also the work of many who work in with death: the people of funeral parlors, pathologists, crematoriums... Havukainen says, her goal was to bring up the subject of death and make it slightly easier for people to discuss. (Hakola, 2014, 76–78.) This kind of focus on death is fresh, for the professionals working with the deceased are rarely thought of. Showing their important yet almost invisible work makes one understand the process and time during the death and the funeral. Since the approach in this exhibition is the Finnish culture revolving death, an idea of a possible juxtapose would be to present also old photographs on how death was dealt with before all this prosperity of today, back when the death happened at home and the deceased were taken care of in home, by the family members. This could be profitable in order for the public to really understand the amount of labor the people who work with death actually have.

Even though the art critics had divided opinions on the exhibition, the public took it mostly well. People had the need to discuss about the subject. Some visitors of the exhibition were shocked, and because of this, crisis intervention was provided for those in need. There were also people who felt like the exhibition is easier to avoid, because its subject is too hard to face. (Hakola, 2014, 79–80.)

Reading about this exhibition was very beneficial for me. The scale of Havukainen's work is a lot bigger than mine, since her's was a whole exhibition, whereas mine is one work in the midst of a collaborative exhibition. When Havukainen was having her exhibition, people who normally don't visit art exhibitions, came to see it. These people were even the majority of the visitors. (Hakola, 2014, 79.) The viewers of my work will be mostly people who are interested in art, apart from the relatives and friends of me and my classmates, who will come see the exhibition in order to be polite and show interest in what their loved-one is up to.



PICTURE 9: 9: Minna Havukainen: Kädet, artikkelista Maassa Taivaassa Kuopiossa (3.11.2010) [1308-k-44-2010-22-ajassa kuopion tapahtuma 2 .jpg-768x630.jpg](#)

4 ABOUT INSTALLATION

On their homepage, the contemporary art museum Tate cites installation often occupies a whole room of a gallery, or at least requires the spectator to move around it. They claim installation is different from sculpture and of other forms of art because it is an experience, rather than a display of a separate artwork. According to Tate Museum, The term ‘installation art’ is used to describe a large-scale, mixed-media constructions, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time. (Tate Museum, n.d.)

In her book ‘Framed Spaces: Photography and Memory in Contemporary Installation Art’, McTighe (2012, 8) claims, if the “white cube” modernist art gallery, which displays painting, excludes the passage of time, then installation would bring time into the gallery space, and it needs to bring viewers and experience into the work of art. According to McTighe, installations often have a certain atmosphere and seek to engage viewers through more of the senses than vision, and they are often specific to the time and place in which they are exhibited (McTighe, 2012, 7).

Installation art can be counted as one of those ephemeral art practices that emerged in the 1960s. Claire Bishop traces a chronology of installation from the mid-1960s to the present based on the idea that the viewer’s direct experience of the work is one of the defining features of installation art. (McTighe, 2012, 8.)

5 ETHICS IN ART

While creating my work, I was troubled by questions of ethics. Is it ok for me to talk about this? I have the freedom of speech, but will I end up hurting someone? Could this work bring back bad memories in some viewer's mind? Am I causing them extra pain? This subject, no matter how inevitable it is to deal with it someday, is still a heavy one, and I wanted to be extra careful with it.

In the introduction for the book *Taiteen etiikka* (Jula, 2007, 21), the Ethics of Art, Jari Jula presents two shocking pieces of Chris Burden. In one work, Burden made his friend shoot himself in his probably most famous art piece, titled "Shoot" (1971). In a performance art piece titled "Doorway to Heaven" he stands in the doorway of his studio, and in front of random passers-by, he gives himself electrical shocks. His chest burns, but he survives. Jula cites, these artworks can be accused of immorality, since the peace of mind of the spectators is set into stake. Where the spectators of the first piece of art have had the time to consider whether they want to go see the work or not (the piece was shown at a gallery space), the spectators of the latter piece had not chosen to see the work. (Jula, 2007, 21.)

These examples are probably cases, in which most people can agree with to be a bit morally questionable. But where does one draw the line? The piece presented first must have been authorized by art professionals, since it was publicly presented in a gallery space. How is this possible? How is a possible manslaughter, in the name of art, considered to be okay? Should one not take responsibility, and if so, what kind? A public apology on a local newspaper? How about the possible PTSD's of the spectators? Who takes the responsibility of them, and pays their treatment?

The freedom of expression has been tried to limit for these justifications:

1. The damage caused to others
2. The damage caused to oneself
3. Offending of other people's moral or religious beliefs
4. Immorality detached from the previous reasons

(Gylling, 2007, 165.)

In the case of Burden's work, at least two of these justifications take place. However, with these justifications, people might have tried to limit the freedom of self-expression, but it does not necessarily mean, these are the right ones, or if there even are any good enough reasoning to limit the expression of freedom. Even though we have acts which the law condemns, how many acts we have that everyone agrees to be immoral?

The artist is sometimes expected to shake and disturb. As persons, they are often expected to be sensational and live outside norms, and disapproval in this case might seem double-standard. The artist has to consider, what kind of works to present, because shocking just for getting famous is also disapproved. (Laiho, 2007, 77.) I have myself always disliked shocking just for shock value and the following fame. Shock is good, if it has a good intention, and if not, it comes across as a cheap, artificial trick.

My own piece of art is not aimed to shock. It is not aimed for making anyone feel uncomfortable. When I decided the subject of my piece, I did it with no one else in mind but myself. I wanted to heal myself, make art for me, as a reminder for myself, that I have lived here and I have felt this way.

While writing this, the artwork has been on display for two weeks and the feedback I have received has been only positive, in the sense that people have been touched but not too gravely. Of course, one has to take into account the feedback I have received has only been gathered from people who have come to me and said it themselves. I have not made a questionnaire, and furthermore, the sampling is very tiny and not nearly big enough for a scientific research.

In his article *Ethics of Art* (Laiho, 2014), Hemmo Laiho claims it is important to remember, it is one thing to handle morally questionable subjects in one's art, and another thing to defend or justify them. Laiho also cites that we generally seem to agree the responsibility is rather the artist's than of the spectator's, who has voluntarily arrived to see the work. Although one can also expect the gallerist or the person arranging the exhibition to take part of the responsibility. However, neither the artist nor anyone else can predict the reception of the artwork. This means that the artist must carefully keep track on the reception and act accordingly, and even cease to exhibit the artwork. Just as anyone else, the artist is a part of the society, in which one is expected to take social and moral responsibility.

6 THE ARTWORK: DANSE MACABRE 1

6.1 The Video Works

Up until my early 20's, I would carry around my stuffed animal, a cat called Heli, and tell her comforting things. I chose to use this in my work, and filmed a video of myself holding Heli and trying to comfort her. I filmed the video in an attic which resembles a wooden cottage, and I turned the colors dark blue.



PICTURE 10: 10: A screenshot of the video *Danse Macabre*, in which I the stuffed animal is consoled. Photographed by Veera Nelimarkka.

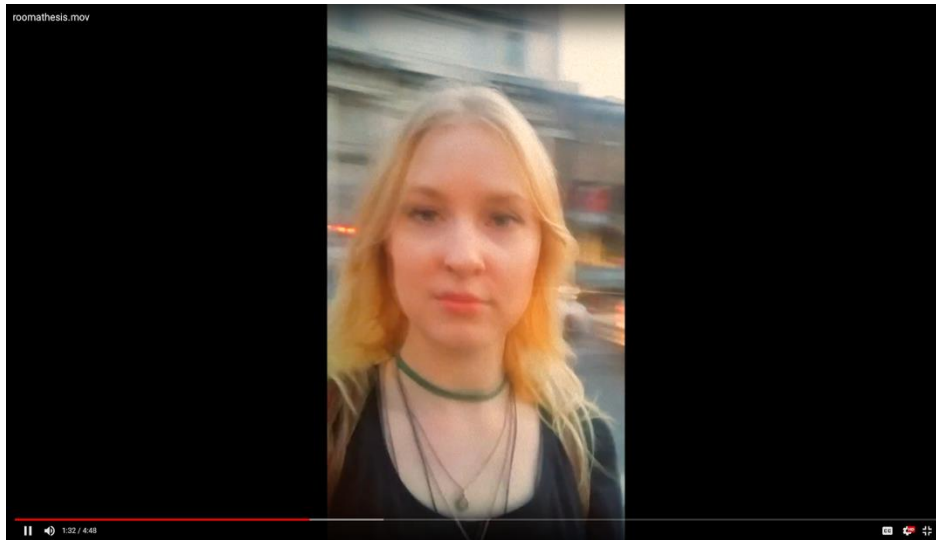
Another video I wanted to have in the room is a videotape I have as of myself as a child, around 8 years of age, putting up a play for the camera with my stuffed animals. I wanted to juxtapose this video next to my own video, to make them engage in a conversation with each other. The motif in both of the videos remains Heli. But in the end, I took off both the sound and the subtitles from the video, because they might have led the viewer's thought into an unwanted path. They also seemed a bit trivial, and without them, the video appeared more interesting.



PICTURE 11: A screenshot of the video Play, in which play with stuffed animals is performed. Photographed by Veera Nelimarkka.

Accordingly, the conversation between me and Heli, in the first film, is actually between me as an adult and me as a child. I layered on it parts which film me running around Rome. It is based on what happened in summer 2016: I wasn't afraid of death. I was on a holiday in Sofia, in the backseat of an expensive car drove by some Turkish guy I had met earlier that day. He drove like a maniac, and I had no seat-belts. It was night-time, everyone was outside, the city looked so beautiful and I laughed, because for the first time in my life, was not afraid of dying. The feeling wore off, eventually. The fear returned to its place. But this experience was memorable. I felt like I was truly alive, for the first time. This is why I wanted to try and stage the experience. Instead of a professional camera, I used a mobile phone, since I wanted the result to look like a holiday film, filmed by an amateur rather than a fine art student or a professional. The result was satisfying.

According to studies, Finns, Karelians and Estonian mothers are the only people who sing to their infants lullabies about death. These lullabies had been born during a time in which infant mortality was common. The text argued that the famous Finnish songs 'tuu tuu tupakkirulla' and 'nuku nuku nurmilintu' are lullabies about death. (Hakola etc, 2014, 14.) There is one Finnish lullaby which even more clearly talks about death, and that is the 'öinen lehto, tuonen lehto', or Sydämeni laulu, in Kalevala. The thought gave me chills, and I decided this song should be the soundtrack of my video.



PICTURE 12: A screenshot of the video Danse Macabre, of the part shot in Rome. Photographed by Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 13: A screenshot of the two videos combined; the end result. Photographed by Veera Nelimarkka.

6.1.2 The Paintings and Photographs

Once I had decided on approaching the subject with paintings as well, I started searching for images and symbols related to death. Good ones were hard to find, for it seemed like most of them were and had been clichés for ages. I used imagery such as boats (=taking the dead away), plants (laurel= victory over death, weeping willow= longing for the deceased), a vanitas (=the decay of everything) and a moth (= In most of my paintings, eyes of the people were covered. This is to underline the fact that death is

relevant to everyone, no matter who you are (eyes= windows to the soul, to who you are; a feature in which one both recognizes the other and can identify with). The easy solution would have been to choose colors which only represent blood (red) or sorrow (black). I went with cold dark blue in one (and also used black as background), but in two of them, I used colors and tones which are associated with lightness (bright and light tones) and girliness (pink). This was, again, to underline the fact that the subject is always there, even in circumstances you might not expect or want to find it.



PICTURE 14: An example of a painting in which flowers were used as symbols: Laurel, oil on canvas, photographed by the Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 15: An example of a painting where a boat was used as a symbol: The Old Men and the Sea, oil on canvas, photographed Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 16 An example of a painting where covering the eyes is used as symbol: Deal With It, oil on canvas. Photographed by Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 17: Another example of a painting where flowers are used as a symbol: Weeping Willow, oil on canvas. Photographed by Veera Nelimarkka.

The coverage of the eyes was used also in photographs. I took new photos and chose some I had taken earlier. I used mostly film photography, because it suits the old theme better. I collected photos which told the story of isolation, loneliness, pain, spiritualism, fear, every feeling and theme I attach with the fear of dying, and death. My crown jewel is photograph of a deceased, with flowers attached on his chest, and mystic movement the prism placed in front of the camera produces. This is to show either the spirit leaving or the last breath escaping. While creating art, I enjoy creating imagery which is not too rigorous but rather ambiguous and airy.



PICTURE 18: The “crown jewel” mentioned in the text, an untitled photograph. Picture by Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 19: Example of photographs used in the installation, untitled. Picture by Veera Nelimarkka.



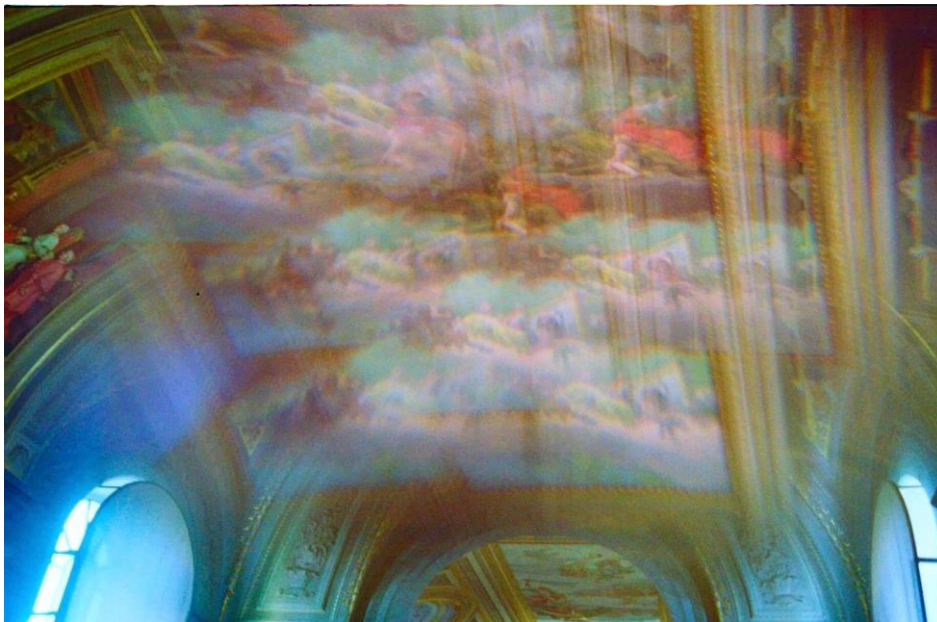
PICTURE 20: An example of photographs used in the installation, untitled. Picture by Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 21: An example of photographs used in the installation, untitled. Picture by Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 22: An example of photographs used in the installation, untitled. Picture by Veera Nelimarkka.



PICTURE 23: An example of photographs used in the installation, untitled. Picture by Veera Nelimarkka.

6.1.3. The Bedroom

My aim was to create an installation: a room, a bedroom, to be precise, which would be filled with art and meaningful objects. I wanted to create videos, paintings and photo-

graphs to the walls of the room, arrange a vanitas out of objects and place an Ars Moriendi, a booklet on how to die, into the room. I also had an idea of using as much flowers as possible. I ended up placing them in photographs and inside of a glass dome.



PICTURE 24: The glass dome, the stuffed animal used in the videos and the Ars Moriendi made for the installation. Photographed by Veera Nelimarkka.

When I had set my mind to making a bedroom, I needed to have a bed. I also wanted a chair, and a mattress, to tie the whole room together, since just a bed would probably not form a bedroom in the viewer's mind. I also thought the mattress would give the bedroom a more cozy feeling. A nightstand was also a must, as it could hold things dear to the person living in the room. A desire to recreate a Vanitas painting in sculpture also needed a small table. These were the pieces of furniture I felt the room really needed, and as much as I wanted to add more furniture, these ones had to be prioritized and others needed to be added only if the resources would give in. In the end, room ended up being so tiny, due the lack of space, I did not add anything else, even though I had an extra armchair that would have both suited the room perfectly and created a place to sit for another spectator.

When recreating the vanitas piece, some objects were, with my resources, impossible to require, for example a golden goblet. I happened to find a cup one drinks wine of during Eucharist from a flea market, which looked perfect for the job. It had to be painted over with golden paint, though, so it would not be recognized as Eucharist accessory and lead the spectator's thoughts on an unwanted path.



PICTURE 25: The Vanitas arranged in the installation. Photographed by Alisa Komendova.

It was important for me that the room should look old. This is to underline the fact that the subject is timeless, instead of being a product of our time and current culture. This demand, that I set to myself made the process of requiring things a bit harder. Everything needed to be already used, and if they weren't, they had to be made look like they were. A brand new pack of cards I bought to use for the vanitas piece needed to be dyed with coffee to create an old look.

While the main video, the center and most important part of the artwork, was projected on the wall and onto the curtain, another video, which was in discussion with the main one, I decided to project on an open box, since studying the symbolism of death, I had learned, an opened box symbolizes the forces of death unleashed. The box was so small, I needed an extra small projector and it needed to be placed very close to the box, and this caused problems, since I did not want the room to have any visible electronics. They would have destroyed the ageless look and brought the viewer back to today's society.

The most difficult thing, however, was creating the room itself. I planned, constructed and build a cottage together with a classmate, and we divided the space into two differ-

ent rooms. As construction material, we used pallets. They were heavy, had to find and to transport, and we needed 60 of them. During the building we received help from people who knew more about woodwork, but the process was still very hard, consuming and slow. The end result looked superb, though, like a genuine old wooden house.

When tutoring my artwork, artist Teemu Lehmusruusu suggested I start thinking about lighting, and find out how it affects my work. This piece of advice was very important but something I had not even thought about. I decided I wanted to use yellow light, to create a home-like light, which emphasizes the fact that once inside the artwork, the spectator is indeed inside, instead of outside, (even though it is clear, once in an art gallery, one is always inside).



PICTURE 26: Example of the end result; how the installation looks in the gallery space. Photographed by Alisa Komendova.



PICTURE 27: Example of the end result; how the installation looks in the gallery space.
Photographed by Alisa Komendova.



PICTURE 28: Example of the end result; how the installation looks in the gallery space.
Photographed by Alisa Komendova.



PICTURE 29: Example of the end result; how the installation looks in the gallery space.
Photographed by Alisa Komendova.

7 CONCLUSIONS

When researching artworks about death, one does seem to come across mostly to works dated on the Middle Ages. This is obviously because the plague was taking so many lives, and thus the subject was always present. Of course, the plague took lives prematurely and this is why it was on everybody's mind, but one would think the subject would also be thought on other eras as well, giving the fact that, even if at old age, death is something everyone will have to face. Granted one has to admit the church being so powerful at the time had also a lot to do with it, but it doesn't seem like the church has, though with less power, been as drastically death-centered as during that time.

Death is, however, still a present theme in contemporary art. Some of the most famous contemporary artists, like Berlinde De Bruyckere, and Damien Hirst, the artist who created the 'For the Love of God', have handled the subject a lot in their work. It is also a common thought that artists like to flirt with death. Does this phrase derive from contemporary art, or is it an old saying coming from already the Middle Ages? Do we still make art about death, in order to remind about ourselves about mortality, or because we want to console ourselves?

Finding any solutions to ethical questions was, of course, hard, giving the nature of the whole concept of ethics. It would have been satisfying to find a universally respected guide on artmaking, which everyone would recognize and agree with. There are, however, a lot of good arguments and styles of thinking one can identify with and take advantage of when justifying with one's actions.

It will be interesting to see, how the subject of death will be handled in art in the future. The standards of living and life expectancy have gotten higher and higher. The science is constantly trying to find solutions to cure deadly diseases, and infant mortality is minimal. Will artworks about immortality emerge? Or is art going to be a means to handle the burden of an extremely long life? Or, as the subject has in the past been viewed as morbid, will a new, positive attitude rise? Will we start painting the reaper, that now comes to visit at old age, as a pleasant, welcomed old friend?

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